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## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SOVIET BLOC PRESSES FOR BOMBING PAUSE IN VIETNAM

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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No. 1621/66

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
25 November 1966

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

Soviet Bloc Presses for Bombing Pause in Vietnam

Summary

Soviet and East European officials have recently been pressing what amounts to a concerted campaign stressing that an end to US bombing in North Vietnam might create conditions favoring an eventual negotiated settlement in Vietnam.

It is possible that these officials think that Hanoi is more receptive to talks after suffering military setbacks in South Vietnam and becoming concerned over the upheaval in China. However, the Soviets and East Europeans have given no hints that North Vietnam is indeed becoming tired or weakened.

The statements by East Europeans may stem largely from a real distaste for a war that threatens their basic interests and endangers their improvement in relations with the US. The Soviets wish to avoid the threat of confrontation with the US over Vietnam, are intent on ending the conflict on terms they can accept, and would gain in their rivalry with China for influence in Hanoi if they could bring an end to the bombing.

Soviet bloc activity is, however, going on in the absence of any visible sign of North Vietnamese willingness to make meaningful concessions. The Soviets and East Europeans are continuing to probe Hanoi's attitude, but, having thus far found continuing rigidity, they may now be trying to determine if there is any give in the US position.

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1. Soviet and East European officials have in recent weeks been pressing the line that a cessation of US bombing attacks on North Vietnam might create conditions favoring an eventual negotiated settlement in Vietnam. The volume and persistence of reports to this effect amount to a concerted campaign, vaster than similar overtures in the past.
2. The various demarches contain the same essential allegation: the US must stop bombing if there is to be any progress toward negotiations. Having stated this sine qua non, the demarches begin to vary. Those from the East Europeans tend to get a step ahead of those from Soviet officials, with some of the former giving what from all appearances are unjustified assurances that a stop in the bombing will draw a favorable response from Hanoi. Usually, however, it is admitted--especially by the Soviets--that it is not possible to ascertain what would ensue if the bombing ceased, other than a more favorable atmosphere for talks.
3. The Soviets and East Europeans generally appear to be asking the US to trust their reading of the North Vietnamese situation. They have indeed had several opportunities in the past few weeks to take this reading. It may be that they have come to believe that a combination of Hanoi's military setbacks in South Vietnam and the increasing uncertainties stemming from the upheaval in China is having an effect on Hanoi's attitude toward negotiations. Thus, it is possible that they think--although perhaps only wishfully--that the North Vietnamese must necessarily be more receptive to talks. The Soviets and East Europeans have given no hints, however, that Hanoi is indeed getting groggy, and conceivably would not do so for fear they would encourage the US to step up the pace rather than slacken it.
4. The Soviets and East Europeans have also suggested that a bombing cessation would increase their leverage in Hanoi, helping them to bring the Vietnamese to the bargaining table. They may genuinely hope this would be the case. During the 37-day bombing pause early this year, the Poles sent a ranking foreign office official to sound out the North Vietnamese. During the

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same pause Soviet party secretary Shelepin performed a similar mission. In neither case did the pause appear to increase Polish or Soviet leverage with the Hanoi leadership. Again, however, Hanoi's growing military problem and the recent chaos in China may have encouraged Moscow and its friends to think that a suspension of bombings might open the channels to negotiations.

5. The statements by the East Europeans may spring largely from a real distaste for a war that threatens their basic interests. Their material contribution to the North Vietnamese effort may grow and siphon off resources badly needed for domestic development. Their involvement also endangers their much-desired improvement in relations with the US. This latter point largely accounts for the East European argument given to the US that the increasing aid to Hanoi is really designed to enhance their influence there and hasten the day when North Vietnam can be persuaded to seek political alternatives to the war. The East Europeans thus have good cause for grabbing at any opportunity to damp down the Vietnamese conflict.

6. The Soviets, of course, further their own aims by creating and sustaining pressure for a cessation of US air raids. They obviously want to avoid the eventual threat of a confrontation with the US, and they are also intent on ending the conflict on terms they can accept. In their struggle with China for influence in Hanoi, the Soviets would gain if they could persuade the US to halt the bombing, especially if the halt were unconditional. In addition, they would remove some of the embarrassment they have suffered from having to stand by all but helpless while their socialist ally is being bombed, an embarrassment which the Chinese have continually exploited.

7. Thus it is clearly in the best interests of the USSR and Eastern Europe to increase the pressure on Washington to stop the bombing. They have done this both directly and by attempts to unite and encourage third country overtures toward this end. The Soviets would expect the US Government periodically to reevaluate the effectiveness of the bombing program, and they probably believe that pressure applied in the right places may strengthen the hand of those who might favor a new bombing lull or outright termination.

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8. All this Soviet and East European activity has been taking place, however, in the absence of any visible sign that the North Vietnamese are ready to make any meaningful concessions. The suspicion must arise that having encountered continuing rigidity in Hanoi, the Soviets and East Europeans are now trying to determine if there is any give in the US position, and have thus increased their pressure for an unconditional termination of US attacks. Nevertheless, they are apparently continuing to probe Hanoi's attitude and a Polish delegation is slated to visit North Vietnam in December.

9. There remains a major--and perhaps critical--area of uncertainty. The effect of the present upheaval inside China upon the situation in Vietnam is far from clear. There are hints of serious North Vietnamese concern over the volatile developments in China. Reported clandestine trips to Peking by Ho Chi Minh himself last spring and summer could be one straw in the wind.

the "craziness" in China has resulted in a "nuance of decline" in Chinese influence in North Vietnam. There is a chance that the future will see a cooling of relations between Hanoi and Peking, which could affect Hanoi's attitude toward continuing the war. The Soviets may indeed be counting on this, but at present their feeling must be more of hope than expectation.

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MEMO NO 1621/66

DATE 25 Nov 66

Due  
Dates:

D/OCI Review 25 Nov 66  
Dissem 25 Nov 66

SUBJECT: SOVIET BLOC PRESSES FOR BOMBING PAUSE  
IN NORTH VIETNAM

REQUESTED OR ORIGINATED BY: DDI

PURPOSE: To survey and analyze recent Soviet and East European  
campaign seeking an end to US bombing in North Vietnam

ASSIGNED TO:

GRAPHICS None

COORDINATE  
OUTSIDE OCI

ONE

DISSEMINATION

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